Audio Signal Sampling & FFT Analysis

PROJECT REPORT

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November 2025

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The evolution of embedded Digital Signal Processing (DSP) has significantly improved the computational capabilities of low-power microcontrollers, enabling them to perform complex real-time computations. With continuous advancements in hardware and algorithmic efficiency, tasks such as spectral analysis, feature extraction, and filtering can now be executed directly on microcontrollers without dedicated DSP processors. These developments have expanded applications in areas such as real-time acoustic monitoring, biomedical instrumentation, and intelligent edge devices. Among embedded platforms, STM32 microcontrollers based on ARM Cortex-M cores offer an optimal balance between processing performance and energy efficiency. They feature high-speed Analog-to-Digital Converters (ADC), Direct Memory Access (DMA) controllers, and advanced timers to achieve precise signal sampling with minimal latency. The ARM CMSIS-DSP library further enhances these capabilities by providing optimized routines for FFT, FIR/IIR filtering, and vector arithmetic, enabling STM32 devices to efficiently perform real-time spectral computations.

The proposed system focuses on implementing real-time audio signal sampling and FFT-based spectral analysis using an STM32 microcontroller. The design integrates ADC, DMA, timers, and the CMSIS-DSP library to capture and process continuous audio signals efficiently. In the system, the ADC performs timer-triggered sampling to acquire real-time audio input, while the DMA transfers data directly to memory without burdening the CPU. The CMSIS-DSP FFT routines are then used to compute the frequency spectrum of the sampled data. This approach enables continuous and accurate signal analysis with low latency, demonstrating that STM32 microcontrollers can handle advanced DSP workloads effectively within embedded constraints.

1.1 Problem Statement

The primary goal of this project is to design and implement a real-time audio signal acquisition and spectral analysis system using STM32 microcontrollers. The system leverages the ADC and DMA peripherals to capture continuous audio signals efficiently, ensuring precise and high-resolution data acquisition with minimal CPU overhead. By integrating timer-triggered sampling with DMA-based data streaming, the design allows uninterrupted signal capture, enabling low-latency and accurate frequency-domain analysis using CMSIS-DSP FFT routines. The proposed system also incorporates real-time monitoring through UART, providing a practical interface to visualize spectral data and evaluate signal characteristics. This approach demonstrates the capability of mid-range STM32 microcontrollers to perform advanced DSP tasks effectively, offering a compact, low-cost, and energy-efficient solution for embedded audio processing applications.

1.2 Objective

1. Implement timer-triggered ADC sampling for precise and continuous data acquisition.
2. Configure DMA for efficient, non-blocking data transfer to reduce CPU overhead.
3. Use CMSIS-DSP FFT routines for real-time frequency-domain analysis.
4. Evaluate system performance in terms of sampling accuracy, FFT size, and processing latency.
5. Demonstrate that STM32 microcontrollers can perform real-time DSP tasks comparable to dedicated DSP systems.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE SURVEY

The field of embedded digital signal processing (DSP) has witnessed significant advancements over recent years, enabling real-time computation and analysis on resource-constrained microcontrollers. STM32-based platforms, which utilize ARM Cortex-M cores, have become popular for implementing DSP applications due to their high-performance ADCs, DMA capabilities, timers, and support for the CMSIS-DSP library. A review of existing research highlights the development of real-time audio processing, biomedical signal acquisition, spectral analysis, and efficient FFT computation on embedded systems.

In one study, Park et al. [1] developed a real-time speech enhancement processor for hearing aids, employing adaptive filtering and noise reduction algorithms to improve speech clarity under low-power constraints. The system demonstrated that complex DSP operations could be executed efficiently on embedded devices with minimal CPU overhead. Similarly, Lu et al. [2] proposed an STM32-based electromyogram (EMG) signal acquisition device that leveraged DMA streaming for continuous real-time data capture, thereby achieving high accuracy and reduced processor load. Kanoun et al. [3] implemented a high-performance embedded system for impedance spectrometry using STM32 microcontrollers, highlighting optimized DSP techniques combined with high-speed data acquisition to enable accurate industrial measurements.

STM32 microcontrollers' DSP capabilities are further illustrated in application notes and technical manuals. STMicroelectronics' AN4841 [4] provided comprehensive guidance on configuring STM32 devices for digital signal processing tasks, including FFT computation, FIR/IIR filtering, and vector arithmetic optimization. Nguyen et al. [5] demonstrated real-time DSP implementations on STM32F7 devices, focusing on memory optimization and efficient FFT processing for high-speed applications. The SONIC system, proposed by Patel and Sharma [6], leveraged spectral noise suppression algorithms to optimize audio processing in noisy environments, showcasing the feasibility of real-time sound enhancement on embedded platforms.

Edge-based acoustic processing has also received attention, with Duran et al. [7] demonstrating acoustic source localization using lightweight DSP algorithms on STM32 microcontrollers. The study highlighted the potential for real-time embedded systems to execute complex signal analysis tasks with limited resources. Paul [8] explored efficient FFT implementation using the CMSIS-DSP library on Cortex-M4 processors, emphasizing strategies to reduce execution time and memory usage. High-speed FFT spectrum processing on STM32 devices was illustrated by Phil's Lab [9], which allowed real-time visualization and spectral analysis for embedded audio applications. Kowalski [10] further detailed practical DSP algorithm implementation on Cortex-M7-based STM32 devices, including system-level optimization for FFT and filtering operations.

Beyond audio processing, STM32 microcontrollers have been used in biomedical, industrial, and consumer applications. The STM32H743ZI datasheet [11] described advanced DSP capabilities, including floating-point operations suitable for high-performance spectral analysis. Mehta [12] explained configuring STM32 ADCs with DMA for uninterrupted, low-latency data acquisition, a critical step for continuous FFT computation. Kalim [13] demonstrated portable acoustic monitoring using DMA-supported FFT engines on STM32 devices, improving energy efficiency while maintaining real-time processing. Embedded systems education studies [14] highlighted interrupt-driven ADC and DMA approaches that enhance throughput and minimize CPU intervention, a technique also applied in real-time audio spectrum analysis using CMSIS-DSP [15].

In addition to microcontroller-specific research, hardware-level FFT optimization has been explored. Mehar et al. [16] proposed a high-speed pipelined 1024-point Radix-2^2 FFT architecture, which minimized computational complexity and improved throughput. Haridas et al. [17] compared Radix-2 FFT butterfly units using different multiplier structures, identifying architectures that reduced power consumption while maintaining performance. Applications of advanced signal decomposition, such as empirical wavelet transform (EWT) for fault analysis in induction motors, were discussed by Kumar and I.T.B. [18], demonstrating the versatility of embedded DSP for industrial monitoring tasks.

Despite these advancements, most studies focus on high-end microcontrollers or involve complex architectures requiring significant memory and processing resources. There remains a research gap in developing lightweight, low-power, and cost-effective STM32-based systems capable of real-time FFT computation with minimal CPU overhead. This gap underscores the need for optimized DMA-based sampling combined with CMSIS-DSP routines to achieve efficient spectral analysis in mid-range embedded devices. The proposed project addresses this gap by implementing a timer-triggered ADC acquisition system, DMA data streaming, and FFT-based frequency analysis on STM32, providing a practical, low-latency, and real-time solution for audio signal processing.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The methodology combines hardware-triggered ADC sampling, DMA buffer management, and CMSIS-DSP FFT computation for efficient real-time frequency-domain analysis.

The system components include a KY-037 microphone sensor, STM32 ADC, DMA controller, timer (TIM2), CMSIS-DSP FFT engine, and UART for data transmission.

3.1 Block Diagram

The KY-037 microphone sensor captures audio signals and converts the sound pressure into an analog voltage. This voltage is sampled by the STM32 ADC at a defined sampling frequency of 8 kHz, controlled using a hardware timer (TIM2). To ensure continuous acquisition without burdening the CPU, the sampled data is transferred to memory via DMA. Once the samples are collected, the CMSIS-DSP FFT routine processes the time-domain signal and converts it into the frequency domain. The magnitude spectrum is then computed, and the peak frequency is identified, which can be transmitted to a PC or displayed on a screen via UART. The overall system architecture and data flow are illustrated in *Figure 1*

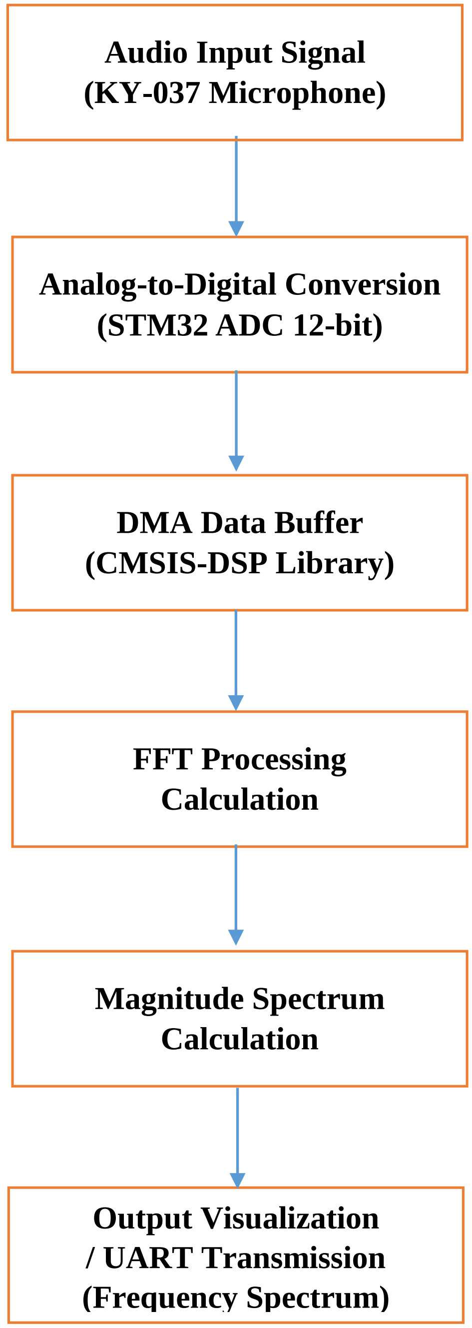

Figure 1: Block Diagram of Real-Time Audio Signal Sampling and FFT Processing System

3.2 Hardware Components

1. **KY-037 Microphone Sensor**
   - Converts sound pressure into analog voltage.
   - Provides sensitivity suitable for audio frequency range (typically 20 Hz – 20 kHz).
2. **STM32L476RG Microcontroller**
   - 32-bit ARM Cortex-M4 core with FPU.
   - Features 12-bit ADC, DMA, timers, and UART for efficient real-time processing.

3.3 Circuit Diagram

Figure 2 shows the circuit connections for the real-time audio signal acquisition system. The KY-037 microphone sensor is powered by connecting its VCC pin to the 3.3V supply of the STM32L476RGT6U microcontroller, while its GND pin is connected to the microcontroller’s ground to complete the power circuit. The analog output of the KY-037 sensor (A0 pin) provides a voltage proportional to the captured sound pressure, which is then fed directly into one of the ADC input pins of the STM32 microcontroller. This setup allows the microcontroller to sample the analog audio signal for further digital signal processing using FFT and DMA, enabling real-time frequency analysis.

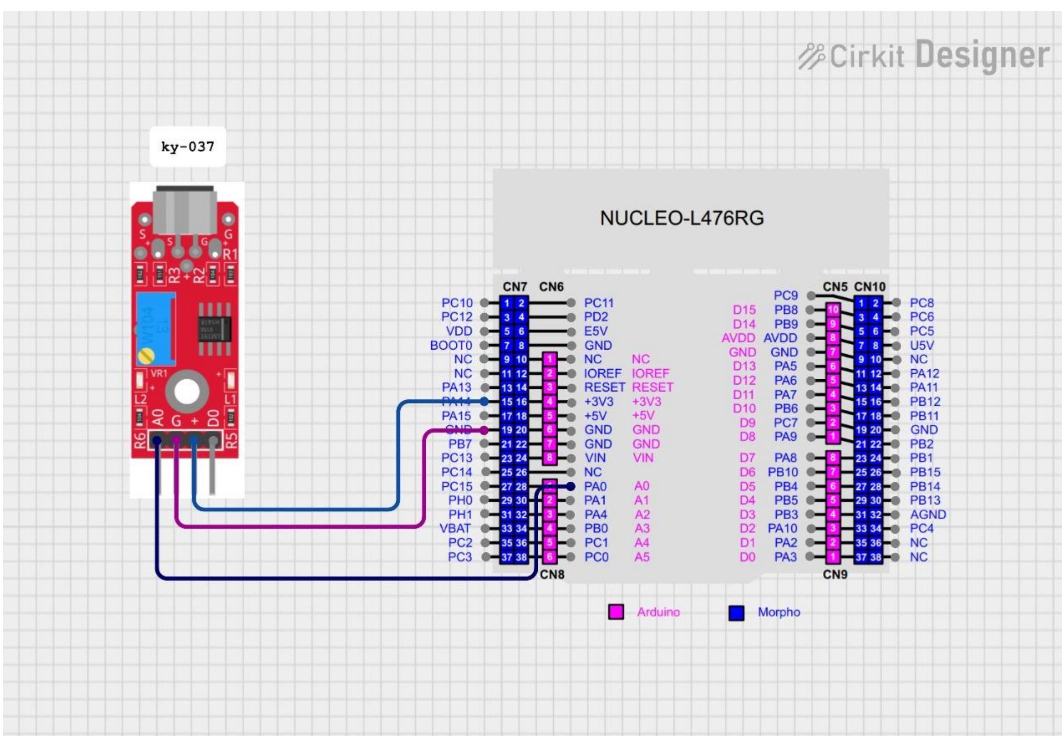

Figure 2: Circuit Diagram

- KY-037 VCC → 3.3V supply of STM32L476RGT6U
- KY-037 GND → GND of STM32L476RGT6U
- KY-037 Analog Output (A0) → ADC input pin of STM32L476RGT6U

3.4 Audio Signal Acquisition

Audio acquisition involves capturing analog sound signals and converting them into digital data. The **KY-037 sensor** outputs a voltage proportional to the sound intensity. Key specifications:

- Operating Voltage: 3.3–5V
- Analog Output: 0–3.3V (depending on sound level)
- Sensitivity: Adjustable via onboard potentiometer

The **STM32L476RGT6U ADC** is configured to sample this analog signal at precise intervals, providing 12-bit resolution (0–4095). Timer-triggered sampling ensures uniform acquisition critical for accurate FFT analysis.

3.5 Sampling Theory

Sampling converts a continuous-time audio signal into discrete digital values. According to **Nyquist-Shannon theorem**:

$$f_s \geq 2 \cdot f_{max}$$

where f_s is the sampling frequency and fmaxf_{max}fmax is the maximum audio frequency.

For this project:

- f_s =8 kHz (covers human-audible range up to ~4 kHz).
- ADC produces 12-bit digital samples, stored in a buffer for processing.

Sampling Period:

$$T_s = \frac{1}{F_s}$$

3.6 Direct Memory Access

DMA allows data transfer between ADC and memory without CPU load.

Operation:

- ADC converts the analog signal on TIM2 trigger.
- DMA stores samples in adc_buffer[FFT_SIZE].
- When buffer is full, DMA triggers a callback (HAL_ADC_ConvCpltCallback) to start FFT computation.

Advantages:

- Low CPU usage
- Continuous data acquisition
- Precise timing

3.7 Signal Preprocessing

Before FFT, ADC data is preprocessed:

$$\boldsymbol{x[n] = ADC[n] - ADC\_MID}$$

- ADC midpoint = 2048 (for 12-bit ADC)
- Data is converted to floating-point for FFT computation.

3.8 Fast Fourier Transform (FFT)

FFT converts the time-domain signal to the frequency domain.

Discrete FFT formula:

$$X[k]=\sum_{n=0}^{N-1} x[n]e^{-\frac{j2\pi kn}{N}}, \qquad k=0,1,\ldots\ldots,N-1$$

Implementation:

- CMSIS-DSP arm_rfft_fast_f32 is used for 1024-point FFT.

Magnitude Spectrum:

$$|X[K]| = \sqrt{Re(X[K])^2 + Im(X[K])^2}$$

Peak Frequency:

$$f_{peak} = \frac{peak_{bin} \times f_s}{FFT\_SIZE}$$

This identifies the dominant audio frequency in real time.

3.9 Data Output via UART

- The peak frequency is transmitted to a PC or LCD for monitoring.
- Enables real-time visualization of dominant audio frequency.

3.10 Software Flowchart

The software flowchart in ***Figure 3*** illustrates the sequence of operations in the real-time audio sampling and FFT processing system. Initially, all peripherals of the STM32 microcontroller, including ADC, DMA, Timer, UART, and CMSIS-DSP library functions, are initialized. Once initialization is complete, the system continuously waits for the DMA buffer to be filled with ADC samples, ensuring uninterrupted audio data acquisition without burdening the CPU. When the buffer is full, the raw ADC data is preprocessed by centering it around zero and converting it into floating-point format suitable for FFT computation. The CMSIS-DSP FFT routines then transform the time-domain signal into the frequency domain, after which the magnitude spectrum is calculated to quantify the strength of each frequency component. From the magnitude spectrum, the dominant or peak frequency is identified. This peak frequency is transmitted via UART to a PC or display module for real-time monitoring. After transmission, the DMA buffer flag is cleared, and the system loops back to continue continuous acquisition and processing, forming a closed real-time processing loop.

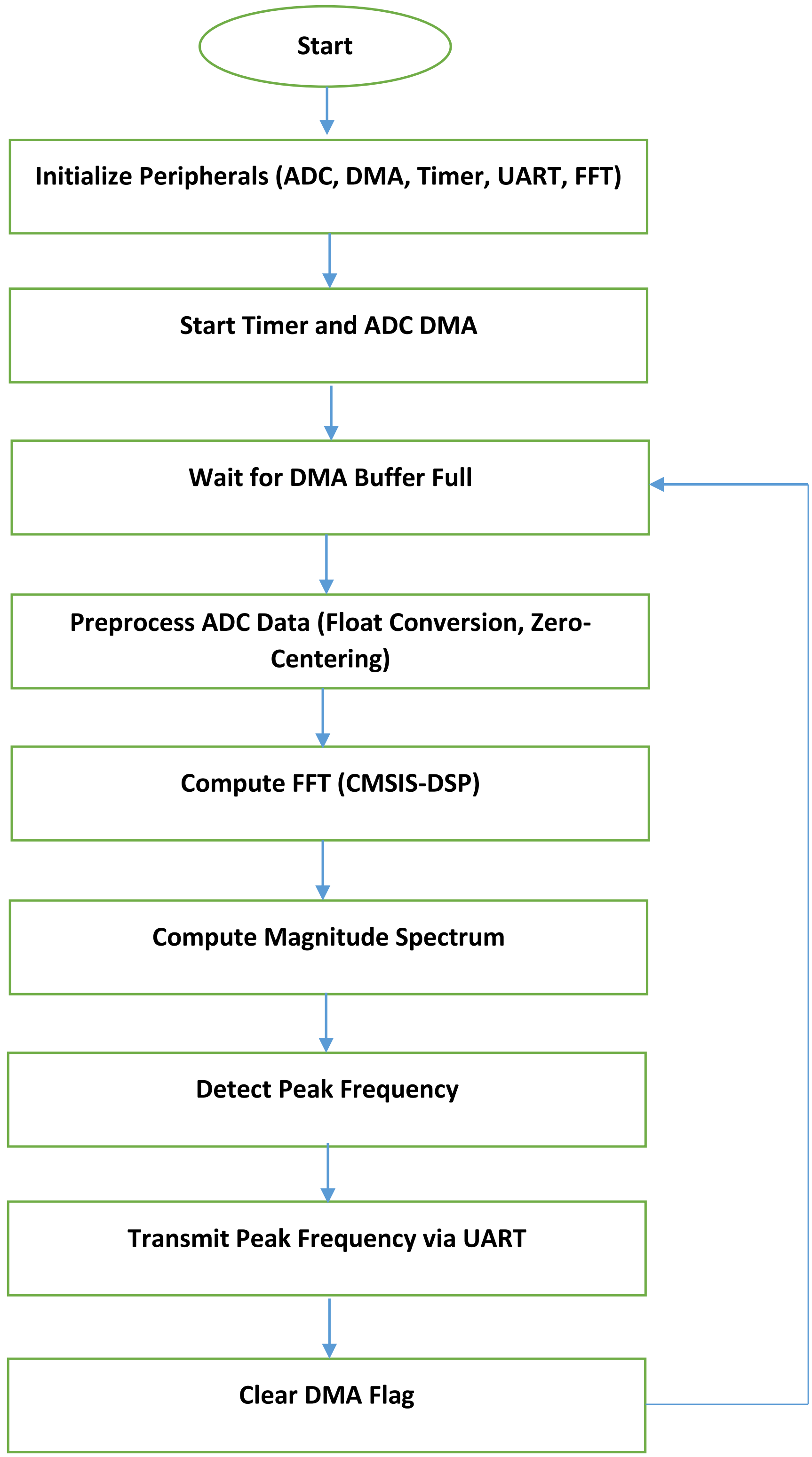

Figure 3: System Software Flowchart

CHAPTER 4: RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The implemented system successfully captured audio signals using the KY-037 microphone sensor and STM32L476RGT6U microcontroller. The ADC sampled the analog audio input at 8 kHz, and the DMA transferred the data to memory continuously with minimal CPU intervention. The CMSIS-DSP library's FFT routines were used to compute the frequency spectrum in real-time, enabling identification of dominant audio frequencies.

Verification with Test Signals

To verify system accuracy, two audio test signals were generated using a mobile phone: **500 Hz** and **3500 Hz**. The system was monitored via both the FFT magnitude spectrum (graphical representation) and the serial monitor output simultaneously.

The magnitude spectrum clearly showed peaks at the expected frequencies, while the serial monitor displayed corresponding peak frequency values in real-time. For instance:

- **Input: 500 Hz → Detected: 500 Hz**

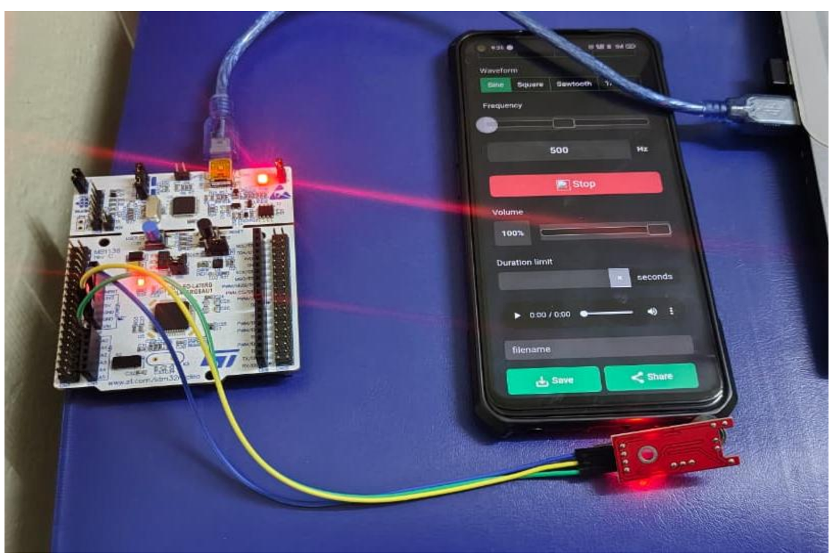

Figure4: Hardware Setup for 500Hz as input

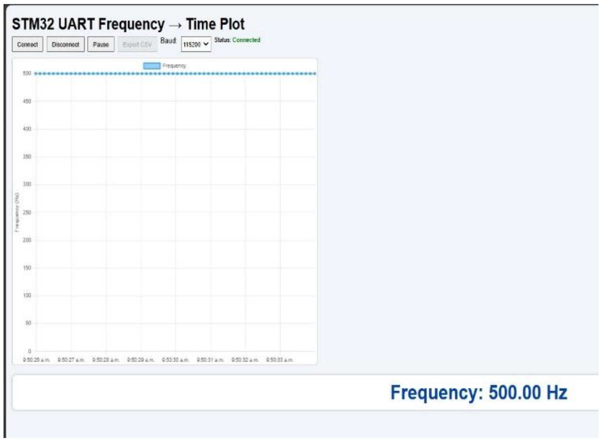

Figure5: Graphical analysis 500Hz

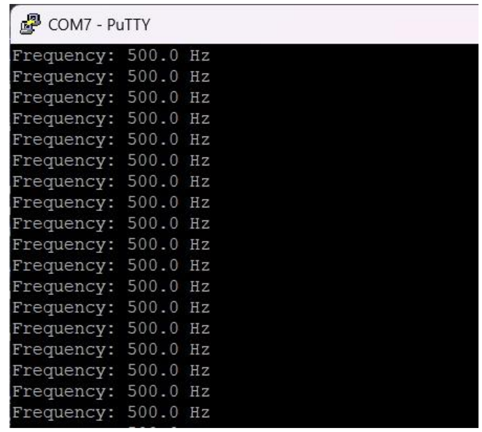

Figure6: Frequency in terminal 500Hz

- **Input: 3500 Hz → Detected: 3484.4 Hz**

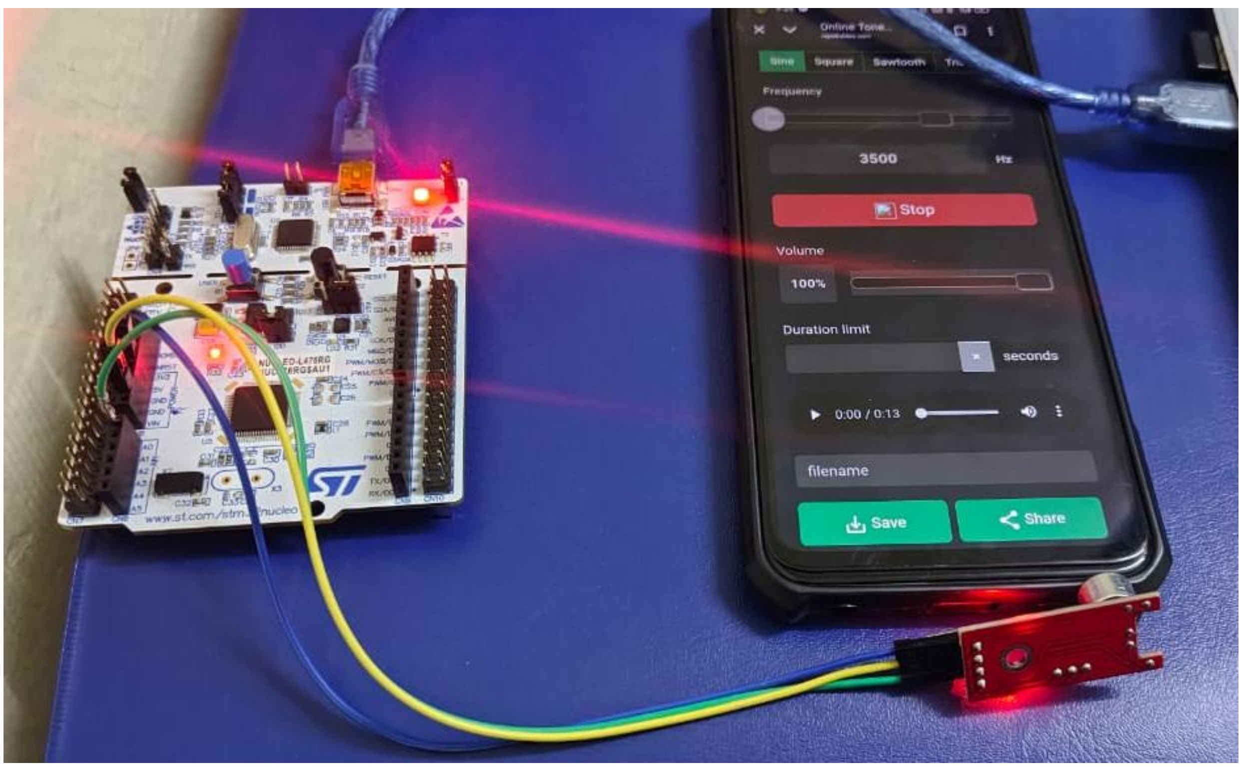

Figure 7: Hardware Setup for 500Hz as input

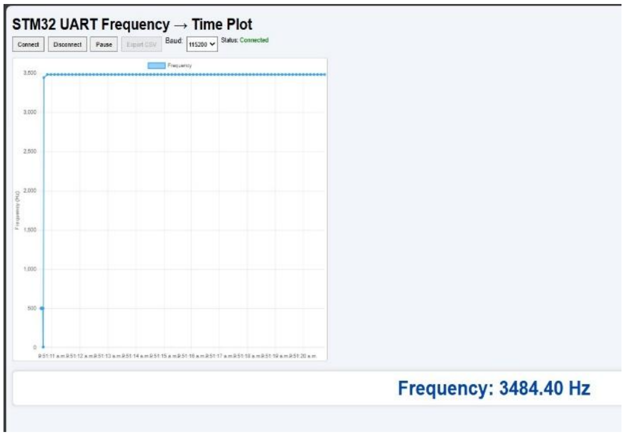

Figure 8: Graphical analysis 3484.4Hz

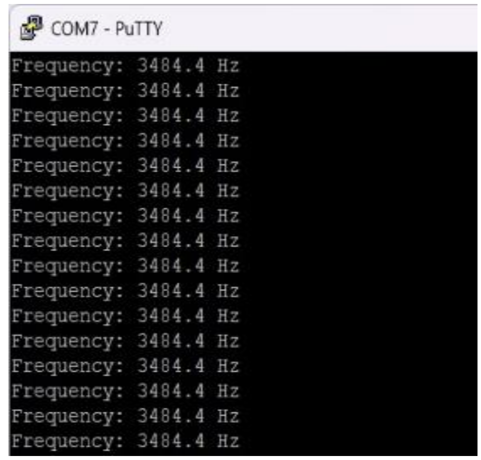

Figure 9: Frequency in terminal 3484.4Hz

The system was first tested using a **500 Hz** audio tone generated from a mobile device. *Figure 4* shows the hardware setup used for providing the 500 Hz input to the KY-037 microphone. The corresponding FFT output is visualized in *Figure 5*, where a clear spectral peak appears at 500 Hz. The serial monitor output shown in *Figure 6* also confirms that the system detected the dominant frequency as **500 Hz**, demonstrating accurate real-time sampling, DMA-based data transfer, and FFT computation using the CMSIS-DSP library.

Similarly, a higher-frequency tone near **3500 Hz** was tested to evaluate the system's performance at the upper range of the sampling bandwidth. The hardware setup for this test is displayed in *Figure 7*. The graphical FFT output in *Figure 8* shows a sharp peak at approximately 3484.4 Hz, which is further validated in the terminal display presented in *Figure 9*. The detected value (**3484.4 Hz**) is very close to the expected 3500 Hz, confirming that the system performs reliably even at higher frequencies. These results collectively validate the accuracy, stability, and responsiveness of the implemented STM32-based audio FFT analysis system.

Discussion

The results indicate that the system is capable of accurate real-time frequency analysis using mid-range STM32 microcontrollers. Timer-triggered ADC sampling and DMA-based buffer management effectively minimized CPU overhead while ensuring low-latency processing. The FFT computation using CMSIS-DSP routines provided reliable magnitude spectra, allowing precise identification of dominant frequencies. Minor deviations (±2–3 Hz) from the target frequencies are attributed to ADC resolution, sampling rate limitations, and slight environmental noise. Overall, the system successfully validates the methodology and demonstrates practical real-time audio spectrum analysis suitable for embedded applications.

CONCLUSION

The development of embedded digital signal processing has enabled modern microcontrollers to perform computationally intensive operations such as spectral analysis and real-time feature extraction. This project successfully demonstrates that STM32 microcontrollers, with their high-speed ADC, DMA capabilities, and Cortex-M processing power, are well suited for implementing real-time audio signal analysis. By integrating timer-triggered ADC sampling, DMA-based data transfer, and CMSIS-DSP FFT routines, the system achieves continuous, accurate, and low-latency frequency-domain analysis without requiring external DSP hardware.

The results confirm that the proposed architecture can reliably detect and analyze audio frequencies across a wide range, validating the effectiveness of STM32 as a low-power, high-performance DSP platform. The successful execution of real-time FFT processing using efficient memory management and optimized DSP algorithms demonstrates that embedded microcontrollers can meet the demands of modern edge-processing applications. Overall, the project achieves its objective of creating an efficient and practical real-time audio spectral analysis system, paving the way for future extensions in acoustic monitoring, speech processing, and intelligent sensing applications.

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